

News Release - For Immediate Release

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## **Waterfowl Production Areas Add \$3.5 Million to Local Economy**

A recent economic study confirms what conservationists have long claimed: public lands dedicated to wildlife benefit not only wildlife, but also add economic value to local communities. In the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District, covering five west-central Minnesota counties, non-local visitors to Waterfowl Production Areas directly spent over \$3.5 million (2004 dollars) and directly added over 36 jobs to the region. The economic study, by Drew Laughland, Senior Economist for Eastern Research Group Inc., considered the number of visitors to Waterfowl Production Areas in the five counties, the distance they traveled to visit a Waterfowl Production Area, and the amount of money they spent on various goods and services as they enjoyed their visits to western Minnesota.

“This is rural tourism at its best.” said Kevin Brennan, manager of 44,000 acres of Federally-owned Waterfowl Production Areas in the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District. “Finally, we can put a dollar figure on the impact these visitors have on local economies throughout the area.”

The economic study measured the direct spending by Waterfowl Production Area visitors throughout Minnesota. Visitors were divided into local visitors, who tend to spend less money on their visit, and non-local visitors who travel over 60 miles to get to the public land. Non-local visitors tend to spend more money on food, lodging, fuel, and other items during their trip. The analysis also considered the total economic impact of the spending as it ripples through the economy. The direct spending by non-local visitors was over \$3.5 million just in the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District alone, and over \$15.5 million statewide. The total impact was over \$4 million and 46 jobs in the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District and nearly \$19 million and 220 jobs statewide.

In the Fergus Falls District, encompassing Otter Tail, Grant, Wilkin, Douglas, and Wadena Counties, there are 44,217 acres of Waterfowl Production Area land. With non-local visitors spending \$3,500,100 annually on their visits, each acre of Federal land generated an average of \$79.16 of tourist spending each year. While the economic analysis did not attempt to break down the spending in each community within the five county Fergus Falls District, it is likely that the spending is roughly proportionate to the acres of Waterfowl Production Area land in each local economic zone. Thus, the areas around Fergus Falls, Evansville, Erhard, Hoffman, Kensington, Wendell, and Pelican Rapids with relatively more Waterfowl Production Areas near them, almost certainly received more of these tourist dollars than areas around Breckenridge, Perham,

Wolverton, Menghga, Parkers Prairie, and Wadena which have less Federal public land near them.

Although not included in the economic study, Federal Waterfowl Production Areas provide many other values to local communities including filtering sediment and nutrients from water as it passes through these lands, attenuation of storm surges reducing flooding downstream, recharging groundwater supplies, and providing habitat for many plants and animals. Thus, the estimates in this study of direct use benefits for Waterfowl Production Areas are only a small portion of the total benefits from these Federal lands.

The entire economic analysis is available online at

[www.fws.gov/midwest/Morris/documents/WMDeconomicreport2005.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/Morris/documents/WMDeconomicreport2005.pdf)